

Meeting #4 Summary - Revised

Water: Life and Meaning

Water Comprehensive Plan Task Force

June 11, Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District (RWMWD)
Meeting Notes by Andrew Jacobson

Members Present: George Johnson (chair), Yung Kang Lu, Cliff Aichinger, Sarah Clark, Bruce Elder, Bob Fossum, Steve Johnson, Boa Lee, Hoka Miller, Gregory Page, Tom Petersen, Shirley Reider, Steve Schneider and John Wells

Members Absent: Marj Ebensteiner, Anne Hunt, Obi Sium, Ron Struss, Rebecca Wooden, Kou Vang and Jie Zhao

Staff Present: Andrew Jacobson, Larry Soderholm, Brain Tourtelotte, Anne Weber and Larry Zangs

Guests Present: Seitu Jones, Randy Neprash, Jake Rife, Judy Sventek and Yang Zhang

1. **Welcome and check-in** by George Johnson. Johnson mentioned that Ramsey-Washington's district office building is an excellent example of the nexus of utility, art and sound environmental (especially water) management, which is appropriate for our meeting topic. Cliff Aichinger also mentioned that the Board of Managers from RWMWD recently approved the new Water Management Plan and it would be finalized soon.
2. **Powerpoint presentation** by Seitu Jones. His presentation was somewhat biographical as well as a case study on the history of the Heritage Park area, slightly northwest of downtown Minneapolis.

Jones is an artist who attempts to blend art and nature through many different mediums as a reminder that art and nature are intrinsic to each other. Jones was born in Minneapolis, worked as an artist on the Heritage Park development in Minneapolis and recently completed his Master of Arts degree in which he focused on environmental history and Heritage Park. Jones currently works as an artist-in-residence for the Minneapolis department of Community Planning and Economic Development.

The Heritage Park area has had three distinct development periods, early immigrant and transitional housing, the Sumner housing project and most recently, Heritage Park. The area has been defined by its development potential due to its proximity to downtown Minneapolis and St. Anthony Falls but also by

the Bassett Creek Valley in which it resides. Bassett Creek Valley was carved by glaciers and up to recently held Bassett Creek which emptied into the Mississippi River. The area has had a long, rich history even before the city of Minneapolis began. However, once Minneapolis began to grow, the commonly flooded area became a cheap housing area for immigrants. Due to frequent, heavy flooding and cheap construction the houses quickly fell into disrepair.

The second developmental period included the second federally funded housing project in the U.S., the Sumner housing project. This project included piping the oft-flooded Bassett Creek into tunnels. However, the area continued to suffer from social and environmental problems like flooding and land subsidence.

The third developmental period started in the early 1990's even though development did not begin until 2000. The City of Minneapolis was sued by local residents for discrimination in the 1990's and lost. The City razed the Sumner housing projects and began anew, this time with appropriate environmental and social conditions taken into consideration. The result is a mixed community with a stormwater management feature as a central community amenity. Heritage Park also included thoughtful art that serves as reminders of the natural and social history of the area. The project has won many awards and accolades.

3. **Moderated discussion** led by Johnson. Johnson reminded us of how we look back at the past and think how awful and environmentally unaware development was 30 years ago. Will people 30 years in the future say the same of us today? How can we plan today to meet future demand for appropriate and beautiful development?

The key question that led discussion was "How can City policies capture and lead public sentiment on the meaning and importance of water over the next 15 years?" The discussion is grouped into several topics by idea.

- Litter
 - There have been no recent, large-scale anti-litter campaigns like in the 1980's. Can/should they be restarted?
 - The Los Angeles River has a trash TMDL – it is a very expensive solution to a behavioral/educational problem.
 - People generally do not toss trash directly into the river yet it ends up there. So, illustrate to people how close they are to the river. Possibly use artistic pavers or signage throughout the city giving distances to the river.
 - Have more trash receptacles or pick them up more often.
- Bottled Water
 - Plastic bottles are the scourge of today's society; strewn everywhere along our waterways and coastlines. If Minnesota offered deposits to recycle plastic bottles, fewer bottles might be thrown away.

- Coca Cola (among others) is selling water convenience. Can the City increase the number and accessibility of public drinking fountains?
- The trend of bottled water is leading to the privatization of water resources, a worrying trend that mirrors the loss of public education. Water and education both used to be public goods; will they still be in 50 years?
- Will bottled water lead to the neglect of water resources?
- Nature
 - Water is a tool and part of nature. Humans should respect that power behind nature (and water) and recognize the importance of natural systems.
 - Humans live within nature. We should value that and not attempt to oppose or hide it. Remove the idea of “Out of sight, out of mind.”
 - We have an engineered environment that tries to control nature, should this idea be reversed? The recognition that we should go with nature’s flow would be the first step in that process.
- Ramsey County and Saint Paul
 - Ramsey County is the most urban county and thus has the least green space per person in Minnesota.
 - In its recent projects Saint Paul Public Works has made a good effort to reduce the volume of runoff, which will be an increasingly important stormwater management tool.
 - Can we daylight Phalen Creek or Trout Brook? **Daylighting either would be quite difficult if not impossible. Part of Phalen Creek is daylighted in Swede Hollow Park. A surface stream is called for in the Trillium plan and some water from Trout Brook may be used.**
 - Saint Paul has deep drainage tunnels that are virtually inaccessible. The key is to keep water from entering them if you want it treated.
 - Lack of funds is always a problem in implementation.
 - Water conservation efforts decrease revenue for SPRWS leading to a double-edged sword.
- Education and the Media
 - Childhood environmental education is essential.
 - Well-placed editorials and articles on water should be more commonplace in the news.
 - Regulation doesn’t make believers, just ‘compliers.’ Education does.
 - Can we make water or the river a unifying theme for Saint Paul?
 - There is a role for the City in public education about water issues.
 - The public has ridden the 1960’s environmental movement but environmental education is slowing as education is cut.
 - “Last Child in the Woods” by Richard Louv has sparked a debate about the benefits of children spending unstructured time outside, but children are spending less and less time outdoors.
 - SPRWS tried a ‘Quality on Tap’ program involving giving away bottles that people would fill with tap water, discouraging

consumption of bottled water. It was not very successful, should it be tried again?

- Behavioral problems (like litter and mistaken perceptions) are halting public progress on clean water programs.
- How can we shift public mindsets, get people to care or feel ownership over water?
- Have a sewer camera that captures video of what types of litter come out of the sewers during rain events. Possibly place this and other educational material at Harriet Island?

- Ideas

- What if we turned the curb system inside out to keep all the bad stuff from flowing into the drains and the Mississippi?
- Rethink (urban) trees and integrate them with stormwater management.
- Increase the visibility of the Watershed Districts. If the watershed district rules are published and the city explicitly detailed how it will act in response to them, this could help illuminate more water issues.
- Integrate water issues into the 'Paint the Pavement' movement.
- Wenck, a landscape architect, took stormwater and made it a public amenity and an element present in the public consciousness (like in Heritage Park).

4. **Announcement of a surface water management work group** by Johnson and Larry Soderholm. The work group will dive more deeply into surface water management issues. They will also help create the structure of future meetings. The work group will include Johnson, Hokan Miller, Bob Fossum, Cliff Aichinger, Tom Petersen, Brian Tourtelotte, Anne Weber, Larry Zangs, Andrew Jacobson and Larry Soderholm.

5. **Check-out** by Johnson.

Meeting ended at 5:30 p.m., followed by a tour of the Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District's offices and grounds, which were designed to incorporate many environmental best management practices.